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### Seeking Grace: Reconstructing the History of African American Alumnae at the University of Denver

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# *Seeking Grace: Reconstructing the History of African American Alumnae at the University of Denver*

Katherine Crowe

## ABSTRACT

The University of Denver (DU), a private college founded in 1864—12 years before Colorado became a state—has recently begun to grapple with its complex and sometimes fraught histories with alumni of color. The DU Archives has partnered over the past five years with the Sistah Network, a student group formed by Black women faculty to support Black women graduate students, as its founder, Dr. Nicole Joseph, wished to focus specifically on the history of the University's Black alumnae. Since 2013, the Archives has completed several oral histories with alumnae from the 1960s, and have recovered the names, graduation dates, and some documentary history of all Black alumnae prior from 1900-1945—43 women in total. A recent exhibit, entitled *Seeking Grace*, honors these women, and is named for Grace Mabel Andrews, the first Black woman to graduate from the University with a BA in 1908. The exhibit is an outgrowth of a project begun in 2013, as a partnership with the faculty co-lead of a student group, the Sistah Network, created to support Black women graduate students at the University of Denver, hoping to honor Black women graduates in advance of the University's upcoming 150th anniversary (sesquicentennial). This article will use this project as an example of how we as archivists address several issues common to "diversity" initiatives in archives: that many begin and end with "firsts" or "significants," and they often do not explicitly center the communities they seek to document in the process.

## Introduction

The University of Denver (DU), a private college founded in 1864—12 years before Colorado became a state—has recently begun to grapple with its complex and sometimes fraught histories with alumni of color. The DU Archives has partnered over the past five years with the Sistah Network, a student group formed by Black women faculty to support Black women graduate students, as its founder, Dr. Nicole Joseph, wished to focus specifically on the history of the University's Black alumnae. Since 2013, the DU Archives has completed several oral histories with alumnae from the 1960s, recovering the names, graduation dates, and some documentary history of all Black alumnae from 1900 to 1945—43 women in total. A recent exhibit *Seeking Grace* honors these women, and is named for Grace Mabel Andrews, the first Black woman to graduate from the University with a BA in 1908. An announcement in the

*Colorado Statesman*, Denver's longest-running Black newspaper, on her graduation read: "Miss Mable [sic] Andrews received the degree of B.A. from Denver University, Wednesday night. She is the first Colored girl of our city to receive this degree. We are very proud of Miss Andrews and feel that the honor conferred upon her reflects credit upon all of our people in Denver."<sup>1</sup>

*Seeking Grace* is an outgrowth of a project begun in 2013 as a UD Archive partnership with the faculty co-lead of student group Sistah Network, hoping to honor Black women graduates in advance of the University's upcoming 150th anniversary (sesquicentennial). This article will use this project as an example of how we as archivists address several issues common to "diversity" initiatives in archives: that many begin and end with "firsts" or "significants," and they often do not explicitly center the communities they seek to document in the process, and do not explicitly center communities they seek to document in the process as "epistemic partners" who drive the work and shape the archives' processes.<sup>2</sup>

This case study will provide a theoretical framework, methodology, and guidelines for college and university archives interested in creating, as Lae'l Hughes-Watkins has framed it, "reparative" archives, and by tackling similar projects, working to create explicitly anti-racist university archives in the American West and beyond.<sup>3</sup>

## Framework and Methodology: Center and Cite Black Women

The framework and methodology for the project has evolved considerably since it began in 2013. As Dr. Nicole Joseph and I discussed in our article "Reconstructing History: African American Alumnae at the University of Denver," the beginnings of the project illustrate the complex and iterative nature of these types of projects, as each initial approach to "solving the problem" contained unforeseen issues we attempted to address as the project progressed.<sup>4</sup> The framework and methodology of the project has been informed by scholars of Critical Race Theory (CRT), specifically as applied to archives and cultural heritage, with a specific emphasis on the work of women scholars in the humanities, almost all of whom are also Black women working within feminist or womanist theoretical frameworks. A recent article by Lae'l Hughes-Watkins focusing on the "reparative archive" in an institutional context—archives that collect, document, and reckon with the human rights abuses inflicted on

1. "City News," *Colorado Statesman*, June 20, 1908.
2. Douglas R. Holmes and George E. Marcus, "Collaboration Today and the Re-Imagination of the Classic Scene of Fieldwork Encounter." *Collaborative Anthropologies* 1 (2008): 83.
3. Lae'l Hughes-Watkins, "Moving Toward a Reparative Archive: A Roadmap for a Holistic Approach to Disrupting Homogenous Histories in Academic Repositories and Creating Inclusive Spaces for Marginalized Voices," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 5, no. 1 (2018): 6.
4. Katherine M. Crowe and Nicole M. Joseph, "Reconstructing History: African American Alumnae at the University of Denver," *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 16, no. 1 (2016).

historically marginalized communities—is particularly salient.<sup>5</sup> In Hughes-Watkins’ framework, only archives that truly reckon with history can repair, or make reparations, for the harm that has been done.

A specifically Black feminist lens has been critical to the project, as archivists and historians of Black and African-American history (focused on the American West and otherwise), who do not identify as Black or as women, have often omitted Black women from archives and historical narratives. In William Katz’s *The Black West* (1971), Black women barely register—many individual Black men are mentioned, but not a single Black woman is mentioned in his concluding, summary chapter. As Akasha Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith noted in their groundbreaking Black feminist volume *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*, not only are Black women omitted from these narratives, but the fullness and complexities of their lives are not explored. Per Historian Darlene Clark Hine in her writing about Black women in the Middle West:

*“Court records of legal encounters, church histories, black women’s club minutes, scrapbooks, photographs, diaries, and businesses, and Phyllis Wheatley Homes to local Young Women’s Christian Associations yield considerable information about the lives of black women migrants to and within the middle western region. Actually, these sources, properly ‘squeezed and teased’ promise to light up that inner world so long shrouded behind a veil of neglect, silence, and stereotype. It is reason enough to study black women simply because they are neglected and historically invisible. Yet, it is incumbent upon us that we examine and interpret their experiences, for this new information may very well facilitate the re-construction of an inclusive and thus far more accurate rendering of all American history from colonial times to the present.”*<sup>6</sup>

Our project’s questions and methodologies have shifted and the pool of scholars we’ve drawn from has grown and changed as the project has progressed and we’ve gained more information about DU alumnae. However, the foundation of this project has, from its inception, been to not only center and uplift the stories of “everyday” Black women through archival collection, as well as exhibition-based interpretation and instruction with primary sources that document Black women’s lives, but to cite and center Black women’s scholarship. Many of these scholars work in interdisciplinary ways, and include archivists (Terry Nelson, Tonia Sutherland, Rabia Gibbs, Taronda Spencer, Brenda Banks, Lae’l Hughes-Watkins), historians (Darlene Clark-Hine, Keisha Blain, Vanessa Siddle Walker, Nicole Joseph), scholars of critical legal studies (Kimberlé Crenshaw, Cheryl Harris), feminism (bell hooks), and citizen archivists (Alta Jett, and the many Black women who supported the “Black Women in

5. Hughes-Watkins, “Moving Towards a Reparative Archive,” 6.

6. Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 107.

the Middle West” project and projects like it). In addition, the current form of the project is being driven and shaped by paid graduate students in the Sistah Network, all of whom identify as Black women, have research interests that intersect with the project, and, in conversation with one another, are driving the project forward in ways that build the archive and support their own scholarship.

This article illustrates where the proposed framework and approach led to a “project pause” of sorts during 2015-2017, largely to ensure that it maintained its “reparative” intent. When Dr. Joseph made a career move to work at Vanderbilt University in 2015, the project shifted focus to research suited to solo “deep dives” into primary sources, rather than the collection of oral histories or seeking out community partnerships. The “deep dive” into the *Colorado Statesman* and other primary source research proved sufficient to create the *Seeking Grace* exhibit in 2017, which “surfaced” the project and allowed for new epistemic partnerships with Black women scholars at DU interested in the project, who had learned about it through the exhibit and partnered in its development. As Gina Schlesselman-Tarango noted in her article “The Legacy of Lady Bountiful: White Women in the Library,” white supremacy and the patriarchy are often enacted in very real, material ways through the white female body, which manifests in the ways the library and archives professions, which are predominantly white and female, approach issues of inclusion and diversity.<sup>7</sup> With this in mind, this project, and projects like it, should center the community in question—in this case, Black women—not just in name, but in material and intellectual ways.

### Institutional Context: University of Denver

The University of Denver, like many predominantly white institutions (PWIs), has a fraught and often violent history with surrounding Native American communities and communities of color. In many ways, this history ties back to University of Denver founder John Evans, with the University’s institutional history as a useful lens through which to view and analyze some of the “multiple Wests” referred to by Taylor and Moore.<sup>8</sup> As Peggy Keeran, Jenny Bowers, and I discussed in “If You Want the History of a White Man, You Go to the Library,” John Evans, who was also Colorado’s second Territorial Governor (1862-1865), was found to be culpable for the Sand Creek Massacre, which occurred in 1864, in the waning days of the Civil War, the same year that the University of Denver was established.<sup>9</sup> The Massacre was an event so brutal that it is the only military action against Native peoples to be

7. Gina Schlesselman-Tarango, “The Legacy of Lady Bountiful: White Women in the Library,” *Library Trends* 64, no. 4 (2016): 667.

8. Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1999), 192.

9. Jennifer Bowers, Katherine Crowe, and Peggy Keeran, “‘If You Want the History of a White Man, You Go to the Library’: Critiquing Our Legacy, Addressing Our Library Collections Gaps,” *Collection Management* 42, no. 3-4 (2017): 159.

explicitly designated a massacre by the National Park Service.<sup>10</sup> Evans was subject to both a military and a congressional investigation before resigning in protest from the office of governor in August of 1865.<sup>11</sup> From 1865 until Evans' death in 1897, he remained on the University of Denver Board of Trustees, as well as remaining involved in the effort to connect Denver with the Union Pacific railroad line in Cheyenne, Wyoming, as well as other railroad enterprise.<sup>12</sup>

The immediate post-Civil War period brought White anxiety about the fate of emancipated Black populations to a fever pitch, leading many White and Black politicians and community leaders to speculate about the possibility of an old concept, "Negro colonization", and its applications to Colorado in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>13</sup> "Colonization" had, during the pre-Civil War period, usually meant the (theoretically consensual) deportation of free Black people outside the borders of the United States as a way of preventing a long-feared revolution by enslaved people. However, after the conclusion of the Civil War, the U.S. government redirected its "colonization" efforts in part to focus on the movement of free Black people into the new Western territories. According to Rayford Logan and Charles Foster, the movement was "perpetrated by a nativism which was pushing Indians out of the way, had imposed social disabilities on the free Negroes, and now wanted to rid the country of all free black men."<sup>14</sup> Evans and other community leaders, including Robert Seymour, pastor at the African Methodist Episcopal Church, attended a meeting held in Denver, May 1879, to discuss the implications of "Negro colonization" in Colorado. At this meeting, Evans revealed his paternalistic views toward fellow Black newcomers to the West, common among white, Christian (in this case, Methodist) settlers like him: "I believe in emigration. It can be made to do great good, it is indeed, often the keystone of prosperity, not to say that salvation of a race."<sup>15</sup> Evans' words show that he clearly did not view the incoming Black settlers as potential students or faculty in the institution he had founded, and even in this framing of new settlers as "laborers, servants, and stock trainers," only "a limited number might be brought here with good results. This is a growing state, and as the

10. Ari Kelman, *A Misplaced Massacre: Struggling Over the Memory of Sand Creek* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2013), 4.
11. University of Denver, "Report of the John Evans Study Committee," November 2014, 77-85, <https://portfolio.du.edu/downloadItem/286858> (accessed July 1, 2018).
12. Maxine Benson, "Evans, John (1814-97)" in *The New Encyclopedia of the American West*, ed. Howard R. Lamar (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
13. Ibram Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Random House, 2017), 226.
14. Quintard Taylor and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, eds. *African American Women Confront the West, 1600-2000*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 19.
15. George H. Wayne, "Negro Migration and Colonization in Colorado-1870-1930," *Journal of the West* 15, no. 1 (1976), 109.

state grows, the demand for laborers increases. I think a number of colored men could do well here, but that they ought not to be brought in indiscriminately.”<sup>16</sup> In 1880, less than a year after Evans made this speech, the University, which had opened in 1864 and then closed in 1867 due to financial troubles, reopened. In 1884, John Hipp, a white man, received the first four-year degree.

## Black Women and Higher Education in the United States and American West

Archives that focus on the documentation of Black women in college and university archives in the American West require an understanding of the specific historical context of Black women in American higher education. The story of Black women and higher education is necessarily intertwined with the history of how white supremacy has impacted equitable access to education on the basis of both race and gender, within different regions of the United States over the course of this country’s history.

Again, the advice of Darlene Clark Hine—in this case, directed at the study of Black women in the Middle West, but relevant to this project as well—is particularly salient:

*“any study of an individual black woman needs to place her in specific regional communities that possess a range of clubs, civic, and religious organizations, and institutions. Black women’s organizations nurtured and sustained black women and empowered and supported black communities. Through voluntary organizations black women were able to develop by the turn of the century a substantial reform and race-uplift agenda. Specifically, the club movement and the early entry of black women into key female professions, such as nursing, social work, librarianship, and teaching, afforded them the means and latitude to impose their own distinct visions and ideas and to initiate a plethora of programs and projects.”*<sup>17</sup>

The role of “Western African American newspapers [was] crucial” to community in the 19th and 20th centuries, according to Quintard Taylor and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, by “providing information on protest struggles and leaders elsewhere, articulately expressing indignation, defending their social communities and the race, and encouraging responsible challenges to discrimination and exclusion.”<sup>18</sup> Established in 1895, *Colorado Statesman* was Denver’s oldest and longest-running Black newspaper, and is one of the few relatively comprehensive sources for late 19th

16. Bowers, Crowe, and Keeran, 159.

17. Darlene Clark Hine, *Speak Truth to Power: Black Professional Class in United States History* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1996), 42.

18. Taylor and Moore, 196.

and early 20th century Black life in Denver. Given the lack of first-person, unpublished archival sources publicly available for study documenting the inner, individual lives and experiences of the Black women who graduated from the University of Denver during this time, the *Statesman* was a natural place to seek evidence of the social life and culture these alumnae inhabited, since it was authored by and for Denver's Black community, if not by the women themselves. In addition, the *Statesman* and other Black community-focused periodicals' emphasis on "racial uplift" meant that any community members' educational achievements from high school graduation through doctoral degrees were well-documented.<sup>19</sup>

Given the explicit prohibition on education for enslaved people, and the lack of comprehensive access to public education for women—especially Black women—it is not surprising that almost no Black women attended four-year college programs during the antebellum period. Many of the Black women who did attend college during this time attended Oberlin, a small private liberal arts college in Ohio, which had been founded by evangelical Christians (Congregationalists) in 1833 to "train teachers and other Christian leaders for the boundless most desolate fields of the west."<sup>20</sup> The first coeducational, interracial college in the United States, many of the female students, Black and White, took a two-year Ladies' Course, while a "Gentleman's Course" of four years led to a Bachelor of Arts.<sup>21</sup> Mary Jane Patterson, who graduated from Oberlin with a B.A. in 1862, is usually referred to as the first Black woman to receive a Bachelor of Arts degree in the United States.<sup>22</sup> Patterson, and many women like her, often went on to become teachers, one of the few professions (in addition to librarianship, social work, and nursing) open to college-educated Black women at the time.

Upwards of 50 percent of college-educated Black women entered the workforce as teachers, well into the 1950s.<sup>23</sup> Many of the issues present for the women featured in Richard Breaux's article, "'To the Uplift and Protection of Young Womanhood': African-American Women at Iowa's Private Colleges and the University of Iowa, 1878–1928" are relevant for an understanding of the experiences of Black women at the University of Denver and in many PWIs (Predominantly White Institutions) from the antebellum period into the early twentieth century. According to Breaux:

19. Kevin C. Quin, "Black Periodicals and the Politics of Racial Uplift," *Black Perspectives*, July 29, 2017, <https://www.aaihs.org/black-periodicals-and-the-politics-of-racial-uplift> (accessed July 1, 2018)..
20. Ellen NickKenzie Lawson and Marlene Merrill, *The Three Sarahs: Documents of Antebellum Black College Women* (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1984), iii.
21. *Ibid.*, 202.
22. *Ibid.*, 203.
23. Richard M. Breaux, "'To the Uplift and Protection of Young Womanhood': African-American Women at Iowa's Private Colleges and the University of Iowa, 1878–1928," *History of Education Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (2010): 172.



*“Despite their college education and intellectual accomplishments, race and gender discrimination [often] limited African-American women to unskilled service or domestic work. In many instances, African-American women with college educations became teachers. On rare occasions, they became college faculty in predominantly black colleges. However, the patriarchal attitudes of African-American men in many of these institutions restricted African-American women’s employment opportunities.”<sup>24</sup>*

Annie Marie Cox (BA, 1910), one of the few Black women to travel to the University of Denver from outside the state to attend, followed this pattern. She came to the University from Little Rock, Arkansas, where her father was the first Black president of Philander Smith College, a Methodist HBCU (Historically Black College or University). She returned to Philander Smith to teach rhetoric, literature, romance languages, and modern language. Her father was President and then President Emeritus of Philander Smith until his death, which overlapped with her tenure as faculty, possibly smoothing her path in ways that would not have been possible for Black women faculty without similar family connections.<sup>25</sup>

Annie Marie Cox’s matriculation is just one example of how the University of Denver’s status as a Methodist institution—and the potential patterns for archivists and researchers to consider in regard to the relationship between Black churches and education in the West, particularly in regard to Black Methodist and Baptist congregations and private colleges established by these faith movements—appears to have been significant in DU’s early population of Black women alumnae. All the Black alumnae who matriculated at the University of Denver between 1900 and 1945 attended one of two Black Methodist churches in the city—Shorter African Methodist Episcopal (AME) or Scott Chapel.<sup>26</sup> This pattern emerged only after we shifted our approach to incorporate the assessment of the *Colorado Statesman*, heeding Darlene Clark Hine’s call to look for specific connections and patterns in regional and local sources that could illuminate larger connections and patterns in Black women’s history, using documentary sources created by and for Black communities.

## Community Context: Black Women in Colorado and Denver

Like Clark Hine’s closely related work on the Middle West, Quintard Taylor’s *In Search of the Racial Frontier* and the edited volume with Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, *African American Women Confront the West, 1600-2000*, intricate notions of Black life

24. Ibid, 174.

25. Biography compiled from decennial census (1900-1940), multiple articles from *Colorado Statesman*, University of Denver yearbooks, and interview with Philander Smith College archivist, from June 2017 to August 2017.

26. Updates for all Black churches in Denver feature prominently in the “local news” sections of the *Colorado Statesman*. All 43 women documented during this project are mentioned in these columns in updates about one of the two existing Black Methodist churches, Shorter AME and Scott Chapel, during the period of 1900-1945.

in the American West at the turn of the 20th century are present in earlier histories. Taylor and Moore's work centers Western Black women's lives as an integral part of the historical narrative of the American West, ensuring that the early urban centers, like Denver, where most of the Black female population of the state resided, are credited as "the first black westerners who could accurately be called a community."<sup>27</sup> Per Taylor: "multiple Wests often existed side by side...as early as 1870 most African American westerners (outside Texas and Indian Territory) resided in cities and towns."<sup>28</sup> Denver's Black population was no exception to this—though small—growing from 46 in 1860 to 8,570 by 1900—that was the case with the Black population of most Western cities.<sup>29</sup> In fact, the Black population of the five largest Western cities (San Francisco, Los Angeles, Denver, Portland, and Seattle) was just over 18,000 in 1910—a fifth the size of the Black population of Washington, D.C., the city with the largest Black population at the time.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the small size of Denver's Black population, churches and civic organizations sprang up almost as soon as there was a substantial population of Black women. According to Hine, these clubs continued "the work of antebellum black women in the anti-slavery movement."<sup>31</sup> These clubs served a similar purpose nationally, reinforcing Black women's "identities as respectable, moral race women," enabling them to be effective leaders in what DuBois called "the kingdom of culture."<sup>32</sup> Churches like Zion Baptist (1865) and Shorter African Methodist Episcopal (AME) (1868) sprang up within a decade of Denver's founding (1859), as did organizations like the Colored Ladies Legal Rights Association (1870s), which challenged racial discrimination.<sup>33</sup> Many women, and in particular, Black women, who sought to increase their and their families' social and economic status by entering professional life, were sidelined into feminized "helping professions" like teaching, librarianship, and nursing. According to Taylor and Moore, "these nurturing institutions cloaked black community women's individual and collective intent to erect bulwarks against the internalization of self-damaging norms, against beliefs that difference meant inferiority."<sup>34</sup> In addition, despite a lack of *de jure* (by law) segregation, many schools, hospitals, and other places of employment in the newer

27. Taylor and Moore, 196.

28. Taylor, 192.

29. Wayne, 103.

30. Taylor, 193.

31. Hine, *Speak Truth to Power*, 42.

32. Ibid.

33. Taylor and Moore, 10.

34. Ibid., 44.

urban centers of the West would not employ Black women who were teachers or nurses. As Breaux's article notes, "Hospitals, private doctors, and schools almost wholly prohibited African-American women from teaching and nursing positions... those who wished to be nurses or teachers had to find work in Kansas City, Chicago, and other Midwest cities."<sup>35</sup> This pattern is borne out in the women who graduated from the University of Denver and went on to teach, almost all likely in segregated schools, in the North and Midwest: Grace Mabel Andrews (BA, 1908) taught in Greenwood, Oklahoma (black suburb of Tulsa and site of "Black Wall Street") and Kansas City; Annie Marie Cox (BA, 1910) taught in Little Rock, Arkansas; Robertann Barbee Cuthbert (BA, 1911) taught in St. Louis and Chicago; Camilla Estrela Spratlin (attended, early 1920s) taught in Washington, DC; Edna May Over Gray (attended early 1920s) taught in Maryland; and Doris Jenkins (BA, 1930) taught in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. It was not until the 1940s that graduates of the University of Denver began to teach in Denver Public Schools—and then, only in schools in the Five Points neighborhood, Denver's historically Black neighborhood.<sup>36</sup>

The labor history of Denver's Black population mirrored the populations of many other western cities. Black women were predominantly employed in domestic labor; men worked in domestic labor or service industries, many of whom were employed as Pullman porters.<sup>37</sup> This was true of several of the earliest graduates' fathers, including Grace Mabel Andrews (BA, 1908), the University of Denver's first Black woman graduate with a four-year degree. Grace's mother Ida, who worked as a seamstress, was born in Tennessee, migrated to Missouri with her three children and was widowed, later marrying a man named Samuel McGuire, who worked as a Pullman porter in Denver. This brief biography of one family is packed with evidence related to these larger historical patterns, many of which raise more questions: how is the rise of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters related to access to education for the children—in particular, the female children—of these men? How do the migrations of Black men and women into the Middle West and West impact the histories of Black students at PWIs in the West?

Andrews' family history is similar to many of the other women who attended the University of Denver during this time—many were born or raised in Denver or a nearby Colorado city or town, and in many cases after their parents moved from the Midwest. Almost all of their parents were born or raised in the deep South and moved North or West during the post-Civil War/Reconstruction period. This project will continue to seek out these patterns within this specific group of alumnae at DU, looking for similarities in the history of Black women matriculating at higher education institutions in the West during this period. Above all, we will utilize this

35. Breaux, 168-69.

36. Biographies compiled from decennial census (1900-1940), multiple articles from *Colorado Statesman*, University of Denver yearbooks.

37. Wayne, 106.

historical and contextual knowledge about these women's lives to support holistic and reparative collection development.

### Early Black Alumnae at the University of Denver: The Project So Far

In 2013, with the 150th anniversary of both the University's founding and the Sand Creek Massacre just around the corner, Dr. Nicole Joseph approached me about an exhibit and a program to honor early Black alumnae at the University of Denver.

We quickly realized that, with the exception of student yearbooks, commencement programs, student newspapers and similar student-produced, published resources, there was very little in the archives to specifically document the lives of early Black women students.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, with the exception of self-reported alumni data, the University of Denver did not capture race or ethnicity information about its students until the 1990s, which made the process of identifying early Black alumnae challenging. We also realized after an initial attempt to identify early Black alumnae based on yearbook photos, that assessment of racial and ethnic identity based solely on photographic evidence was both flawed and problematic. Even after cross-referencing our initial, photo-search-based results with the decennial U.S. census, we found inconsistencies and knew we were missing some of the women who had attended, as some of the living women we had spoken with mentioned specifically that they either couldn't afford or chose not to pay the fee required to include a yearbook portrait. The *Colorado Statesman*, Denver's primary Black newspaper, provided the ideal solution. We found that, while a full review of the newspaper from this period of time was very time-consuming, this approach solved two methodological issues. First, it was a community-based source of information, meaning all identifications of race and ethnicity were made by the community members (or at least those on the *Statesman* editorial staff). Second, given the community emphasis on education and racial uplift, the *Statesman's* coverage of Black educational achievements in Denver, from high school graduation through college, was as thorough and comprehensive a source as we could have asked for.

This realization, thankfully, coincided with my impending sabbatical, which University of Denver librarians apply for every six years. Most of my sabbatical over the summer of 2017 was spent reviewing (on microfilm) each issue, from 1900 to 1948, of the *Colorado Statesman*, all of which is held at the Western History Department in the Denver Public Library. The data gathered during this survey, as well as the historical context provided in previous sections of this article, was utilized in the creation of an exhibition, which we chose to entitle *Seeking Grace* as both a nod to Grace Mabel Andrews, the first Black woman to receive a four-year BA degree (1908), as well as a reference to the project's intent to establish a "reparative archive", one with a focus not only on collection acquisition, but the inclusion of this history in

38. Crowe and Joseph.

instruction across the disciplines, as well as community-based partnerships and outreach with libraries and museums dedicated to the documentation and representation of the Black experience in the United States. With this in mind, we made sure that the *Seeking Grace* exhibit culminated in a May 2018 event co-sponsored by the University Libraries, honoring the work of the Sistah Network and featuring a remote speech from Dr. Nicole Joseph, the project's co-founder. I was also able to partner with faculty in two different departments (Higher Education and History) to use the exhibition in the context of their classes.

As of late October 2018, I secured short-term funding to hire two research assistants, both of whom are current graduate students in Higher Education who are part of the Sistah Network. We also scheduled and are beginning to plan the logistics of an event and long-term exhibition of *Seeking Grace* at the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library which will open in late February 2019, in partnership with the Sistah Network, University of Denver African Alumni Affinity Group, and Morgridge College of Education Alumni. The exhibit is presently on display in the Morgridge College of Education in a student study area, due to the connection of Dr. Tara Raines, a faculty member in the College and the current faculty advisor to the Sistah Network. The project is the focus of an upcoming article in the University of Denver Alumni Magazine fall issue, discussing the project and the impact of the Sistah Network on the lives of contemporary Black women graduate students and recent alumnae. This will provide an opportunity to honor the Sistah Network's contributions and great current work, as well as reach out to the families of the alumnae featured, in hopes of acquiring additional personal papers from these women, for donation at the institution of their choice, or preservation at home, if the family chooses.

I've also identified and am in the process of writing short term internal and longer-term external grants that could continue to fund this project, which is necessarily multi-year. Parallel to this, the Interdisciplinary Research Incubator on the Study of (In)Equality (IRISE) has expressed interest in working with additional community partners to create K-12 curriculum. I've already worked with faculty across disciplines to incorporate content already created into the University of Denver curriculum as appropriate to the course, and I plan to continue this.

## Conclusion

Darlene Clark Hine is cited heavily throughout this article, and in other articles about this project, and it still does not feel equivalent to the intellectual heft of her contributions to American history, let alone to the history of Black women in the United States. Her pioneering work on the Black Women in the Middle West project is foundational to this project in so many ways. The depth and breadth of her work on the histories of Black women has deeply impacted the shape of this project, and how I continue to think about the process of seeking out archives and personal histories of the Black women alumnae of the University of Denver.

This project is one of the many “micro-studies” into “individual lives, of neighborhoods, families, churches, and fraternal lodges in various cities” that Hine has called for, in hopes that an “examination of these themes makes imperative an even deeper penetration into the internal world of African-Americans.”<sup>39</sup> According to Hine, “Information derived from statistical and demographic data on black... migration and urbanization must be combined with [archives], histories, autobiographies, and biographies of twentieth-century migrating women...this new information may very well facilitate the re-construction of an inclusive and thus far more accurate rendering of all American history from colonial times to the present.”<sup>40</sup> This vision, combined with the closely aligned vision of Hughes-Watkins’ “reparative archive”, will continue to guide this project, as will the many collaborators and accomplices who will see it into its upcoming phases. I hope that this article will also provide some context for other college and university archives in the West embarking on, or interested in embarking on similar projects.

39. Wayne, 107.

40. Hine, *Hine Sight*, 109.

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